United Nations S/2008/264

Security Council

Distr.: General
21 April 2008

Original: English

# Seventh semi-annual report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)

## I. Background

1. Over the past six months, Lebanon has continued to experience a severe political crisis, currently centred on the failure to elect a President of the Republic. The position has remained vacant since 24 November 2007, when the extended term of President Emile Lahoud ended. Despite the energetic and sustained efforts of Lebanese, regional and international players, all attempts to elect a new President have been fruitless. The electoral void has fuelled political polarization and impeded the normal functioning of the legitimate constitutional institutions of the country, in particular the Government and the Parliament. It has also contributed, at times, to violent confrontations between the opposing parties, leading to casualties. The absence of an agreement on the presidential election threatens the very foundations of the Lebanese State, and the sovereignty, independence and stability of Lebanon. The country currently confronts challenges of a magnitude unseen since the end of the civil war, with possible regional repercussions.

2. The series of terrorist attacks and assassinations that have shaken the country since October 2004, targeting symbols of Lebanon's sovereignty, have continued unabated. On 12 December 2007, an explosion killed Major General François el-Hajj, head of the operations of the Lebanese Armed Forces, together with his driver, and injured nine others. On 25 January 2008, Major Wissam Eid, head of the technical section of the Information Branch of the Internal Security Forces, was killed along with five others and 20 people were injured.

3. On 8 January 2008, troops of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) were attacked for the third time since the war of July/August 2006, outside the area of operation. On 15 January, an explosion apparently targeted a vehicle of the Embassy of the United States of America, leaving three people dead and wounding dozens. This was the first attack on a diplomatic target in Beirut since the days of the civil war. The climate of insecurity has induced several countries to issue travel warnings to Lebanon and to reduce the staff of their Embassies in the country.

4. Late in January, demonstrations held to protest against ongoing power cuts in the southern suburbs of Beirut turned violent. Eight people were killed and about 22 others wounded in Beirut. Those riots were perceived as the worst violence the country had witnessed since 2007, when clashes erupted between supporters of the

ruling 14 March coalition and others from the opposition camp, claiming the lives of five people at the Beirut Arab University. Lebanese leaders from across the political spectrum appealed for restraint and demanded that their followers withdraw from the streets. The Lebanese army is investigating those clashes. So far, 6 army personnel and 11 civilians have been arrested.

5. During the night of 12 to 13 February 2008 a car exploded in the Kfar Susseh neighbourhood of Damascus. The blast killed Imad Moughniyeh, a senior commander of Hizbullah, and his bodyguard.

6. On 14 February, with a massive rally, the Lebanese marked the third anniversary of the assassination of the former Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri. On the same day, another gathering was held in southern Beirut on the occasion of the funeral of Imad Moughniyeh.

7. On 29 and 30 March, an Arab League summit was held in Damascus, in a tense atmosphere, as Lebanon remained in the grip of an intense political crisis and still had not elected a President. In their final communiqué, the Arab leaders restated their commitment to the Arab League plan for Lebanon, including the immediate election of a President.

8. The protests in front of the Prime Minister's office that started in December 2006 and which have disrupted regular political life in Lebanon and substantially affected the regular economic activity of the centre of Beirut have continued.

## II. Implementation of resolution 1559 (2004)

9. During the reporting period, the Government of Lebanon continued to express its strong commitment to making progress in extending its authority over all of the Lebanese territory and in asserting the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence on the country. The failure to elect a President of the Republic in a free and fair electoral process, without foreign interference, polarized the situation in Lebanon, however, and constituted a significant obstacle to the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004). Resolution 1559 (2004) thus remains to be implemented in full.

10. Over the past six months, my representatives and I have remained in regular and close contact with all parties in Lebanon, as well as with relevant regional and international players.

### A. Sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon

11. In my earlier reports, I stated that the Security Council in resolution 1559 (2004) placed central emphasis on the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon throughout Lebanon, and that I assigned this matter the highest priority in my efforts to assist with the implementation of the resolution.

12. I wish to recall that significant steps have already been taken towards the implementation of the resolution. In my second semi-annual report, of 26 October 2005 (S/2005/673), I was able to certify that free and credible parliamentary

elections had been held early in 2005. I was also able to confirm the withdrawal of Syrian troops, military assets and the military intelligence apparatus from Lebanon.

13. I have since maintained my efforts to encourage the early initiation by Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic of a process, based on an agreed action agenda, which would eventually lead to the establishment of full diplomatic relations, in fulfilment of the relevant provisions of Security Council resolution 1680 (2006). I believe that mutual diplomatic representation is the most appropriate way to address any bilateral issue, and steps taken towards that end will further contribute to improving the bilateral relationship between the two historically close neighbours. Regrettably, however, there has been no progress, to date, towards this goal. I therefore reiterate my call on the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon to take steps towards the establishment of diplomatic relations. Such steps would significantly contribute to the stability of the region. I commend the call by the Prime Minister of Lebanon, Fouad Siniora, in his televised speech of 28 March 2008, for the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

14. The delineation of the border between the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon remains an element of crucial importance to a number of explicit operational requirements of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006), which place central emphasis on the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon throughout Lebanon. In addition, the explicit mandate contained in resolution 1559 (2004) for Lebanon to extend its governmental authority over all of its territory can only be realized if the Government of Lebanon and all other relevant parties know what the entirety of the territory of Lebanon is, with its exact boundaries determined and delineated. I have continued my work in relation to the issue of the occupied Shab'a Farms area, as outlined in my most recent report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2008/135). I have taken note of the letter from Prime Minister Siniora dated 2 April 2008 on the same matter. The timely implementation of tangible measures towards the delineation of the border between the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon would constitute an important step towards the extension of the Government's control over all of its territory and to stability in the region. Lebanon has reiterated to me its willingness to progress swiftly on this issue. I expect the full cooperation of the Syrian Arab Republic to that end.

15. Preventing breaches of the arms embargo is a critical element in the achievement of the above-mentioned objective. The Government of Lebanon has continued to be deeply concerned by smuggling activities along its eastern and northern land borders. A number of Member States have continued to provide me with information that appears to corroborate the allegation of a flow of weapons and fighters across the Syrian-Lebanese border.

16. The Syrian Arab Republic has continued to deny any involvement in effecting breaches of the arms embargo, and indicated that there are contacts between itself and Lebanon regarding the control of their common borders. It has further affirmed that it has increased the presence of its border guards.

17. Over the reporting period, Lebanese territorial integrity has continued to be regularly violated by Israeli aircraft flying into Lebanese airspace. The Government of Israel has continued to claim that those flights are carried out for security reasons. My representatives in the region and I have regularly continued to reiterate

our concern and call on Israel to cease the increasing number of overflights, which are in violation of Security Council resolutions.

18. Israel continues to occupy the northern part of Ghajar, which constitutes a violation of Lebanon's sovereignty. I will report on this matter to the Council in my next report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

## B. Extension of the control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory

19. Because of the ongoing political crisis in Lebanon, in particular the impasse in electing a President and the deteriorating security situation, the Government's ability to extend its authority over all Lebanese territory has remained restricted. Moreover, the opposition has continued to question the legitimacy of the Government.

20. The Government of Lebanon has reiterated to me its vital interest in improving its monitoring over its land borders to prevent the unauthorized flow of weapons, munitions and personnel into the country.

21. The Lebanese armed forces continued to contribute to improving peace and stability in southern Lebanon, despite being overstretched as a result of the competing security challenges they face. These include the maintenance of their deployment in southern Lebanon; the provision of internal security, in particular in the light of the continued blockade of the centre of the capital city; preparation for traditional territorial defence; and engagement in anti-smuggling activities.

22. I therefore reiterate my call on donor countries to come forward to help the Lebanese armed forces meet their obligations under relevant Security Council resolutions, including the establishment of the democratically elected Government's monopoly on the legitimate use of force throughout Lebanon, in fulfilment of the provisions of resolution 1559 (2004).

23. The continued existence of militias and allegations of widespread rearming and paramilitary training across the spectrum constitutes a challenge for the Government of Lebanon's authority throughout its territory.

24. During the night of 30 to 31 March 2008 a UNIFIL patrol encountered unidentified armed elements in its area of operation. This serious violation of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006) gives cause for concern and will be reported more fully in my next report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

## C. Disbanding and disarmament of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias

25. Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias continue to operate in the country. The most significant Lebanese militia is the armed component of Hizbullah. In addition, several Palestinian militias operate in the country, inside and outside of refugee camps. The existence of armed groups challenges the control of the legitimate government, which by definition is vested with a monopoly on the use of force throughout its territory. It is also incompatible with the restoration and full respect

of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of the country.

26. Regrettably, in recent months, there has been no discussion among Lebanese political leaders about a political process leading to the disbanding and disarming of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias as called for by the Taif Agreement and resolution 1559 (2004).

27. In the context of the prolonged deadlock that has paralysed Lebanon, there have been more and more reports and increasing speculation that militias are expanding their existing weapons arsenals or are reacquiring a weapons capacity. In addition, fears have frequently been voiced that even the uneasy interim status quo maintained in the aftermath of the civil war — under which most Lebanese political groupings, except Hizbullah, had given up their armed capacities — may unravel, leading to widespread rearming and raising the spectre of a renewed confrontation among the Lebanese. The United Nations has not been able to investigate in depth the empirical basis for such fears. I am deeply concerned, however, that the divisive public and media debate — whether based on evidence or speculative — may in fact accelerate, if not prompt, a domestic arms race in Lebanon, with unforeseeable consequences. In that context, it is important that all States, in particular neighbouring States, abide by the arms embargo called for in resolution 1701 (2006).

**Palestinian militias**

28. Over the past six months, there has been no progress towards the disarming of Palestinian militias in accordance with the agreement reached in the Lebanese National Dialogue of 2006 that Palestinian militias outside the camps would be disarmed.

29. I have maintained close contact with the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which has assured me of its support for the full implementation of all the provisions of resolution 1559 (2004). The PLO Chairman and President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, expressed publicly on numerous occasions the need for the Palestinians in Lebanon to respect the sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon, and Lebanese law and security requirements.

30. I am pleased to report that on 7 January 2008, the representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Lebanon, Abbas Zaki, launched, at the initiative of President Mahmoud Abbas and in coordination with Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, the Palestine Declaration for Lebanon. For the first time since the end of the civil war in 1991, PLO outlined its policy towards Lebanon and the bilateral ties governing the two. The document addressed two main concerns: resettlement and arms. Concerning the former, the document rejected any resettlement plan and emphasized Palestinian respect for Lebanon's independence and sovereignty. As for the weapons, without making a distinction between Palestinian arms present inside refugee camps and those outside, the document stipulates that all arms carried by various Palestinian factions must be subject to Lebanese laws and must not be used in any inter-Lebanese conflict. Further, PLO made a reconciliation effort by offering the Lebanese an unconditional apology for "any damage we [the Palestinians] have caused to our dear Lebanon whether intentionally or not" since 1948. In the same spirit, the document urged the

Lebanese to improve the living conditions of the refugees. I commend President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Fouad Siniora for this initiative.

31. Palestinian refugee camps continue to pose a major challenge to stability and security in Lebanon, owing in particular to the presence of a range of non-State actors in the camps. I remain concerned that threats from Al-Qaida-inspired militias in Palestinian refugee camps continue. On 21 March 2008, clashes between Fatah and the extremist militant group Jund al-Sham, which is known to espouse an Al-Qaida-oriented ideology, erupted in the Palestinian refugee camp of Ain al-Hilweh, leading to one fatality.

32. While the situation in most of the 12 Palestinian refugee camps remains relatively stable, the threat of internal violence that could potentially spill over into surrounding areas exists in a number of camps, particularly in southern Lebanon. In this regard, I continue to be concerned about the emergence of new militant groups. Given the detrimental effects of living conditions in the camps on the wider security situation in Lebanon, it is imperative that progress be made not only towards disbanding and disarming Palestinian militias in Lebanon but also towards improving the conditions in which the refugee population lives, without prejudice to the settlement of the Palestinian refugee question in the context of an eventual Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. In this context, I thank the Government of Lebanon for its continued support to the ongoing Camp Improvement Initiative of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

33. The battle in Nahr al-Bared in 2007 represents a stark reminder of the grave threat that armed groups pose to the stability and sovereignty of Lebanon, underlining the urgency of disarming them. UNRWA and all relevant Lebanese authorities, notably the Prime Minister's Office, are completing a master plan for the reconstruction of the camp. The reconstruction effort will be a long and complex operation that will require the full support of international donors.

34. I remain deeply concerned by the activities of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada, which maintain significant paramilitary infrastructures outside refugee camps and along the border between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. These two Palestinian militias are headquartered in Damascus. I therefore remind the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic that it bears a responsibility for urging those groups to abide by Security Council resolutions and the decisions of the Government of Lebanon.

35. I take note of the public call on the Syrian Arab Republic by Prime Minister Siniora, on the eve of the Arab League summit on 28 March 2008, to cooperate with Lebanon to disarm Palestinian militias which are headquartered in Damascus.

**Hizbullah**

36. Hizbullah's maintenance of an armed component and a paramilitary infrastructure separate from the State has an adverse effect on the efforts of the Government of Lebanon to assert its exclusive control over the entire territory of Lebanon. It also constitutes a threat to regional peace and security.

37. Over the reporting period, in several public pronouncements, the leaders of Hizbullah have repeatedly claimed that it has rebuilt and increased its military capacity since the war of July and August 2006, in violation of Security Council

resolutions. There are reports that Hizbullah has also continued to develop, throughout the country, a secure communication network separate from the State's system. These developments give rise to a growing impression that parallel institutional structures are being built up distinct from those of the State.

38. I call on all Lebanese leaders to initiate discussion on the status of Hizbullah's paramilitary arsenal. All parties have so far agreed that a Lebanese-led political process is the most appropriate mechanism through which to address the question of Hizbullah's weapons. The initiation of a serious, genuine and sustained dialogue on this issue should no longer be delayed. The eventual disarmament of Hizbullah and the completion of its transformation into a solely political party, consistent with the requirements of the Taif Agreement, is a key element in the full restoration of Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence.

39. In the meantime, I am mindful of the regional ramifications of this issue. I therefore wish to reiterate my call on all those parties which maintain close ties with Hizbullah and have the ability to influence it, in particular the Syrian Arab Republic and the Islamic Republic of Iran, to support its transformation into a solely political party, consistent with the requirements of the Taif Agreement, as a means to achieve the full disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias in the best interest of regional peace and stability.

**General**

40. I am alarmed by the consistent allegations that militias on all sides of the political spectrum are reappearing in contravention of both the Taif Agreement, which ended the civil war in Lebanon and which led to the disbanding and disarming of most Lebanese militia, and resolution 1559 (2004). In this context, the increasing pattern of celebratory shootings in the air when political leaders are delivering speeches is deeply disturbing and exposes civilians to danger. According to the Internal Security Forces, since January 2007, the practice has led to two deaths and 10 injuries.

41. I call on Lebanese parties to halt immediately all efforts to rearm and engage in weapons training, and to return instead to dialogue through the legitimate political institutions, in particular the Parliament, as the only viable method of settling issues and resolving the ongoing political crisis. The ultimate purpose of disarmament is the establishment of a strong Lebanese State for all the inhabitants of Lebanon, as the Taif Agreement stipulated. Therefore the disarming and disbanding of all remaining militias must be realized in such a way as to strengthen the central authorities, not to weaken them. It is a definitional requirement of a State to hold the monopoly on the legitimate use of force throughout its territory. It is particularly important in Lebanon as the Government continues to face undiminished challenges from Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias.

42. I reiterate once again my firm conviction that the disarmament of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias must be carried out through a political process that will lead to the full affirmation of the authority of the Government of Lebanon throughout all of its territory. Such a political process presupposes, in the first instance, clear respect of the Constitution by all parties, as well as dialogue and a spirit of cooperation and conciliation between the various political forces in Lebanon. A return to political dialogue and a resolution of the ongoing political

crisis in Lebanon — most notably the issue of the Lebanese presidency — is necessary for such a far-reaching political process.

## D. Presidential election process

43. In resolution 1559 (2004) the Security Council declared its support for a free and fair presidential election in Lebanon conducted according to Lebanese constitutional rules devised without foreign interference or influence. Since September 2004, the Security Council has regularly, through its presidential statements, expressed regret that a presidential election has still not been held.

44. I am also deeply concerned that a presidential election has still not been held. I reiterate my strong conviction that a new President must be elected without delay in a free and fair electoral process conducted strictly according to Lebanese constitutional rules, without any foreign interference or influence, in accordance with the provisions of resolution 1559 (2004). The continuing electoral void is dangerous for the integrity and sovereignty of Lebanon. Such an election would also help to revive the ordinary and constitutional political process in Lebanon, in particular the convening of Parliament, which has been paralysed since November 2006. I am disappointed that the repeated calls of the Lebanese people and the international community for an election have not been heeded. At the same time, I remain mindful of the negative role played by external forces, intermingling with Lebanese internal dynamics, in the political stalemate in the country. Such foreign interference is in violation of Security Council resolutions.

45. On 15 November 2007, I travelled to Beirut to urge all Lebanese political leaders to think about the future of their country, transcend sectarian and individual interests, and elect a President without any conditionality beyond those prescribed by the Constitution.

46. On 24 November 2007, the extended term of President Emile Lahoud ended without incident. The powers of the presidency, in accordance with the Constitution, were transferred to the Council of Ministers.

47. Throughout the reporting period, international and regional players have deployed intense efforts to facilitate dialogue between the opposing parties to bridge the gaps for an agreement on the presidential election, including through an engagement with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, which has acknowledged its influence in Lebanon.[1] I requested my Syrian interlocutors to encourage their political allies in Lebanon to reach a political compromise with the ruling majority in the best interest of Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and the region.

48. At the end of November, the ruling majority put forward General Michel Sleiman as a potential consensus candidate for the presidency. His candidacy was accepted by the opposition early in December under certain extra-constitutional conditions, including the composition of the Cabinet.

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[1] "Syria's allies and friends in Lebanon are today stronger than ever. They are more powerful than they used to be during the presence of the Syrian forces in Lebanon". Public statement of the Vice-President of the Syrian Arab Republic, Farouq al-Shara'a, at a meeting of the National Progressive Front in Damascus on 11 December 2007.

49. As the electoral void continued, I convened on 17 December 2007, on the sidelines of a donor conference for the Palestinians in Paris, a ministerial meeting attended by Egypt, France, Italy, Jordan, Portugal (European Union Presidency), Saudi Arabia, Spain, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, the European Commission and the European Union High Representative. The meeting issued a statement of strong support for Lebanon and called for Parliament to be allowed to convene immediately to fulfil its constitutional duties. The Ministers reaffirmed their support to the legitimate Government of Lebanon and urged their Arab partners to come up with an initiative to unlock the political impasse.

50. On 6 January 2008, the Foreign Ministers of the League of Arab States convened in Cairo and unanimously agreed on a three-point plan to end the constitutional crisis in Lebanon. To promote the implementation of the plan, the Secretary-General of the League, Amre Moussa, has travelled several times in the past three months to Beirut, Damascus and other regional capitals. I commend and support his sustained and energetic efforts.

51. On 27 January 2008 the Arab League Foreign Ministers met again in Cairo and noted that the impasse continued, as the majority and the opposition disagreed on the interpretation of the portion of the plan related to the composition of the government of national unity. On 6 March, the Arab League Foreign Ministers reconvened and decided to add to their original plan a provision calling for the improvement of Syrian-Lebanese relations.

52. On 29 and 30 March, the ordinary annual Arab League summit was held in Damascus. Several Arab delegations decided to reduce the level of their representation in protest at the non-implementation of the Arab League plan for Lebanon. The Government of Lebanon decided not to attend the summit.

53. On the eve of the summit, the Prime Minister of Lebanon delivered a televised speech in which he spelled out the reasons that kept Lebanon away from the summit and outlined the principles of any future relations with the Syrian Arab Republic. Accusing the latter of having "obstructed" the Arab initiative, the Prime Minister said it was "unacceptable for sisterly Syria or friendly Iran or any friendly country or any other country in the world to treat Lebanon as an area of influence or an arena for fighting" and that both countries should respect Lebanon's independence and sovereignty. He further indicated that "a new chapter of relations with Syria should be based on mutual respect and relations should be between two Governments so that neither the Lebanese nor the Syrians should have relations with political factions or military groups operating in the other State". He called inter alia on the Syrian Arab Republic to establish diplomatic ties with Lebanon, delineate their common border, address the issue of Lebanese detainees in Syrian custody and cooperate in disarming Palestinian militias located in Lebanon whose headquarters are in Damascus.

54. In his opening speech at the Damascus summit, the President of the Syrian Arab Republic denied that his country was interfering in Lebanese domestic affairs and expressed his commitment to Lebanon's sovereignty and political independence. In particular he said, "we affirm, once again, our concern for the independence of Lebanon, its sovereignty and stability", and added: "The key to a solution in Lebanon is in the hands of the Lebanese themselves. They have their own country, their own institutions and their own Constitution and they are capable of doing that

by themselves. Any other role should be supportive to them, and not an alternative to their role. We, in Syria, are absolutely ready to cooperate with any Arab, or non-Arab efforts, in this domain, provided that the initiative, or any initiative, is based on the ground of national reconciliation, because it is the only foundation for stability in Lebanon, which is our ultimate goal and objective."

55. In the final communiqué of the summit, the Arab leaders called for adherence to the Arab League initiative to settle the Lebanese crisis. They also urged "Lebanon's leaders to accomplish the election of consensus candidate General Sleiman on the set schedule and agree on the basis for the formation of a national unity government as soon as possible". The statement also stressed placing Lebanese-Syrian relations on the proper track in line with the interests of both States and assigning the Arab League Secretary-General to start working on achieving this goal. The Arab leaders finally emphasized the importance of the "formation of the international tribunal to reveal the truth in the assassination of ex-Premier Rafiq Hariri and his comrades, aside from vengeance and politicization".

## III. Observations

56. The prolonged political and security crisis in Lebanon illustrates that the provisions of resolution 1559 (2004) remain as relevant now as they were when the resolution was adopted. Lebanon's steady efforts to reassert, beyond dispute, its sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence have suffered many setbacks. Since September 2004, the people of Lebanon have started to speak out loudly and clearly, breaking taboos of the past. I commend the Lebanese people and their political leaders in their quest to shape a new future of self-determination, independence, coexistence and peace.

57. Nevertheless, more has to be done if Lebanon is to accomplish the process it started of fully restoring its sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence. The country has a Government that continues to enjoy democratic legitimacy bestowed on it by a process of free and fair parliamentary elections, under the supervision of international monitors. However, it continues to confront several challenges, most importantly the inability to elect a President, which constitutes a step backward on the road towards the full implementation of resolution 1559 (2004). The electoral void combined with the stalled functions of Parliament are threats to the country's ability to operate as a sovereign, democratic and independent State.

58. Today, the Lebanese people have a unique opportunity to open a new chapter in their difficult history. They and their political representatives must rise to this occasion and elect a President without any conditions beyond those prescribed by the Constitution. Such an election would signify a major milestone on the road towards the full reassertion of Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence, which is the goal of resolution 1559 (2004).

59. I regret that, despite the numerous calls of the Lebanese people and the international community, such an election has still not been held in Lebanon. I firmly believe that the leaders of Lebanon must think first and foremost about the future of their country and transcend sectarian and individual interests. Parliament, which has not met in more than a year, must be allowed to convene urgently to fulfil its constitutional duties, so that a President can be elected without further delay. A

free and fair presidential election, without foreign interference or influence, must be held immediately. The current situation is no longer sustainable. I am also concerned that further delay in electing a President will complicate the adoption of an electoral law and the holding of parliamentary elections on time, in the first quarter of 2009.

60. I commend and support the tireless efforts of the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Amre Moussa, over the past few months, to help the Lebanese bridge their differences and put an end to the electoral void. I welcome the decisions of the Arab summit on Lebanon, reiterating its support for the Arab League initiative for Lebanon, and urge all concerned States and parties to cooperate urgently with the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States for their immediate implementation.

61. I continue to be deeply disturbed by the series of political assassinations and attempted assassinations that Lebanon has endured since October 2004. I condemn these acts of terror, which constitute a direct attack against Lebanon's sovereignty and institutions. It is imperative that the perpetrators of these crimes are brought to justice.

62. Three years after the military withdrawal of the Syrian Arab Republic from Lebanon, the time has come for a redefinition and formalization of ties between the two historically close neighbours, in mutual respect for their sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence. In this context, the establishment of full diplomatic relations between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic and the delineation of their shared border, in particular in the Shab'a Farms area, would promote the normalization of relations between the two countries and constitute significant steps to secure peace and stability in the region. It is also time for the two countries to address in their bilateral contacts the issue of Lebanese detainees in Syrian custody. I have taken note of the offer of Prime Minister Siniora, in his televised speech of 28 March 2008, to address and resolve these issues. I call on the Syrian Arab Republic to accept that offer.

63. The disarming and disbanding of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias is a necessary element to complete the consolidation of Lebanon as a sovereign and democratic State. It is high time, 18 years after the end of the civil war, eight years after the Israeli withdrawal, three years after the withdrawal of the Syrian troops, and a year and a half after the war between Israel and Hizbullah, for all parties concerned, inside and outside Lebanon, to set aside this remaining vestige of the past. Hizbullah's maintenance of a paramilitary capacity poses a key challenge to the Government's monopoly on the legitimate use of force.

64. I reiterate my position that the disarming and disbanding of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias should be carried out through an inclusive political dialogue that addresses the political and economic interests of all the Lebanese. I urge renewed political dialogue in Lebanon to affirm the commitment of all parties to the disarmament of militias in Lebanon, including Hizbullah, in fulfilment of the terms of resolution 1559 (2004). In this context, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Islamic Republic of Iran, which maintain close ties with the party, bear a significant responsibility in supporting such a process, for the sake of the security, stability and welfare of both Lebanon and the wider region.

65. I am also deeply conscious of the conditions in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and the challenges that arise from them. I commend the Government of Lebanon, working in close cooperation with the Palestine Liberation Organization and UNRWA, for its commitment to improving those conditions. The United Nations system stands ready to work with its Lebanese and Palestinian partners towards this goal, while we also exert all efforts to help bring about an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement at the earliest possible time. I call upon Member States to contribute generously to the forthcoming appeal by the Government of Lebanon and UNRWA for the reconstruction of the Nahr al-Bared camp and the rehabilitation of the surrounding region affected by last year's violence, at a planned donor conference to be held under the auspices of the World Bank.

66. In conclusion, a return to political dialogue among the Lebanese parties through Lebanese constitutional institutions is absolutely imperative and the only way to resolve all outstanding issues, first and foremost the election of a new President and the resumption of normal activities by the Parliament. Lebanon must preserve its comprehensive and, most importantly, conciliatory political framework, as set out in the Taif Agreement. In the meantime, I am mindful that Lebanon has remained a battleground for actors seeking to destabilize the region for their own benefit and aspirations of dominance, as manifested tragically during the war of July/August 2006. It is time for the Lebanese people and their political representatives alone to determine the fate of Lebanon.

67. I emphasize that the Security Council in resolution 1559 (2004) explicitly called on all parties concerned to cooperate fully and urgently with the Council for the full implementation of that and all relevant resolutions concerning the restoration of the territorial integrity, full sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon. The United Nations stands firmly beside the Government and people of Lebanon in this quest. I call on all parties and actors to fully abide by resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006). I will continue my efforts to bring about the full implementation of these and all other relevant Security Council resolutions with a view to achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace throughout the entire Middle East region.